

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Sacramento, Calif.
February 1956

Honorable Harold J. Powers, President of the Senate
and
Honorable Luther H. Lincoln, Speaker of the Assembly

Pursuant to Division 5, Part 1, Chapter 2, Article 1.3 Section 3211 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the Coordinating Council on State Programs for the Blind herewith submits to the Legislature its fourth annual report covering the period from July 1, 1954 to June 30, 1955.

Copies of this report are being forwarded to the State Board of Social Welfare, the State Board of Education, and the State Board of Public Health.

We believe the work of the Council has furthered the principle contained in the statute creating the Council; namely, provide for the coordination of the functions and programs of the various state departments insofar as such functions and programs affect the blind.

We trust this report will be of assistance to the Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

California

COORDINATING COUNCIL ON STATE PROGRAMS
FOR THE BLIND

Malcolm H. Merrill, M. D., Director
State Department of Public Health

George K. Wyman, Director
State Department of Social Welfare

Roy E. Simpson, Director
State Department of Education

LIBRARY OF THE
LEGISLATURE

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Sacramento, *Calif.*
February 1956

Honorable Harold J. Powers, President of the Senate
and
Honorable Luther H. Lincoln, Speaker of the Assembly

Pursuant to Division 5, Part 1, Chapter 2, Article 1.3 Section 3211 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the Coordinating Council on State Programs for the Blind herewith submits to the Legislature its fourth annual report covering the period from July 1, 1954 to June 30, 1955.

Copies of this report are being forwarded to the State Board of Social Welfare, the State Board of Education, and the State Board of Public Health.

We believe the work of the Council has furthered the principle contained in the statute creating the Council; namely, provide for the coordination of the functions and programs of the various state departments insofar as such functions and programs affect the blind.

We trust this report will be of assistance to the Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

Calif.
COORDINATING COUNCIL ON STATE PROGRAMS
FOR THE BLIND

Malcolm H. Merrill, M. D., Director
State Department of Public Health

George K. Wyman, Director
State Department of Social Welfare

Roy E. Simpson, Director
State Department of Education

MAJOR DEPARTMENT OF THE BLIND
LIBRARY

MEMBERSHIP, ORGANIZATION, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

At the beginning of the twelve-month period covered by this report (7/1/54 - 6/30/55), the Council members were:

Malcolm H. Merrill, M. D., Director, State Department of Public Health

Charles I. Schottland, Director, State Department of Social Welfare

Roy E. Simpson, Director, State Department of Education

During the year, Mr. George K. Wyman replaced Mr. Schottland as Director of the State Department of Social Welfare, and as a member of the Council.

The organization and functions of the Council were the same as during previous years, with the Coordinating Committee on State Services for the Blind serving as a working committee reporting to the Council at its regular quarterly meetings.

REVIEW OF DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS

I. Social Welfare Programs for the Blind

A. California's Social Welfare Programs for the Blind are geared to encourage the rehabilitation of sightless men and women by assisting them to achieve physical, social and economic adjustments -- thus reducing dependency and enriching the lives of these persons. First, financial assistance is provided for the purpose of purchasing the basic needs of life. Second, blind persons who are able and willing to try to achieve self-support are given encouragement through exempt income provisions. Third, eye care service is available to all applicants and recipients who have an eye condition in which treatment may either restore vision or prevent further loss of sight. Fourth, persons eligible for aid who require medical care in public medical institutions may receive their grants while patients in such institutions, \$15 being paid to them directly for their personal and incidental expenses, and the remainder to the institution to be applied to the cost of care.

1. Aid to Needy Blind -- The purpose of the Aid to Needy Blind program is "to relieve blind persons from the distress of poverty, to enlarge the economic opportunities of the blind, and to stimulate the blind to greater efforts in striving to render themselves self-supporting." About 12,300 persons were receiving this type of aid in 1955. Two-thirds of these individuals were over 65 years of age and, for the entire group the average length of residence in California was 31.7 years. About 56 per cent had no income except their Aid to Needy Blind grant, and one-third of those who had income had less than \$10 a month.

2. Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind Residents -- Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind Residents is designed "to provide a plan for this state whereby the blind residents of the state may be encouraged to take advantage of and to enlarge their economic opportunities, to the end that they may render themselves independent of public assistance and become entirely self-supporting." Nearly 400 persons receive aid under this program each month. During the past fiscal year a total of 155 recipients under the program were discontinued. Of this total number, 49.1 per cent were discontinued because of earnings. Almost 37 per cent were discontinued because of transfer to Aid to Needy Blind. During the previous fiscal year, a total of 173 recipients under the program were discontinued, 32 per cent because of earnings and 55 per cent because of transfer to Aid to Needy Blind.
 3. Prevention of Blindness -- Under this program the state pays the entire cost of treatment for persons whose vision can be restored or blindness prevented by medical care. Surgeries are performed by private ophthalmologists in private hospitals with assignments made on a rotating basis to a panel of eye specialists. County welfare workers prepare social evaluations for the purpose of determining whether the person will be able to profit, economically or personally, from improved vision. During the year ending June 30, 1955, 227 surgeries were performed and about 31 persons were treated each month to prevent blindness from glaucoma. About four persons every week during the year have their sight restored under the program. Since 1945 a total of 1,533 surgeries have been performed. Approximately 95 per cent of cataract surgeries have been successful.
 4. Medical Care -- The provision that Aid to Needy Blind could be paid to patients in public medical institutions was added to the law by the 1955 session of the California State Legislature. Its purpose is to make improved medical care available to recipients of aid whose primary need is for such care. Even though the statute did not become effective until September, 1955, by the close of that calendar year some 179 Aid to Needy Blind recipients were already receiving this service.
- B. Decreasing Dependency -- Following are the major areas of effort being carried on by the State Department of Social Welfare in order to achieve what it conceives to be a sound public assistance program for the blind:
1. In order to effectively implement legislation requiring those administering Aid to the Blind to do everything possible to help blind persons decrease dependency, a four-way referral plan was entered into by the department a year and a half ago with the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, Oakland Orientation Center for the Blind, and Field Service for Adult Blind in the State Department of Education. As a result of this agreement, those blind persons who have the potential for becoming self-supporting are carefully screened and specialized state services are made available to them. This formal referral agreement, effecting a

close coordination of the activities of the state agencies serving the blind, also materially promotes physical and social adjustments. During the period from May 1, 1954, to December 31, 1955, a total of 1,404 referrals were made by the department to Field Service for Adult Blind, State Department of Education. Of these 1,404 referrals, Field Service for Adult Blind referred 87 to the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and 27 to the Orientation Center for the Blind. In order to utilize the resources offered by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation to assist those current recipients of Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind in their efforts to achieve full self-support the department is referring directly to the bureau all such recipients with the exception of those who are already trainees of the bureau. Thus far some 267 Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind recipients have been so referred.

2. Each year several round-table conferences are held at geographically strategic parts of the state, participated in by staff members of the department's Division for the Blind and county welfare workers handling Aid to the Blind cases. These conferences, which are organized on a regular basis, raise the entire standard of administration and enrich state supervision.
3. At present almost 90 per cent of the statewide case load of Aid to the Blind is administered on a segregated basis, i.e., by specialized workers. Considerable progress has been made by the counties in achieving smaller case loads. By the close of the last fiscal year some nine of the ten largest counties had established special bureaus for the blind. These special bureaus and the smaller and specialized case loads are doing much to implement the statutory requirement that efforts be made to decrease dependency.

C. Prevalence of Blindness in California -- The probability is that California's total blind population ranges between 25,000 and 30,000 persons today, with somewhere around 50 per cent receiving Aid to the Blind. While admittedly there are no reliable data for determining the exact number of blind persons living in California, nor are there reliable data for determining whether or not there has been an increase or decrease in the incidence of blindness in the total population, nevertheless, the number of persons receiving Aid to the Blind in California has shown a growth pattern very similar to that for the total population of the state. There is good reason to believe that, whatever the trend in incidence rates, the number of blind persons increases as the total population grows. In June of 1940 there were 7,145 recipients of Aid to the Blind in California. By June of 1950, the number had risen to 10,389; and in June of 1955, it stood at 12,655. Barring discovery of some miraculous methods for preventing blindness, it is likely that this trend will continue. In fact, it may become accelerated as the proportion of aged persons in the total population increases, for many forms of blindness are typically afflictions of the aged. The State Department of Finance estimates that the population of California by 1960 will be more than 15,000,000 persons and expects that the growth of the state in population will be greater in those over 65 years and those less than 18 years. Since California's population will be represented by an increasingly large percentage of those aged 65 years and older, and since it is this age group which has the highest incidence of blindness, it is obvious that

we can expect the total number of blind persons in the state to gradually increase and, obviously, the Aid to the Blind case load will, for the years immediately ahead, gradually increase from year to year.

At present more than two-thirds of the recipients of Aid to the Blind are over 65 years of age. It is possible for this trend to be sharply reversed in the future, although not immediately. This is due to two factors: First, the increased coverage and larger amount of Old Age and Survivors Insurance will mean that fewer and fewer persons 65 years of age and over will be applying for public assistance. Second, the number of younger blind persons has increased rapidly. The number of blind children of preschool age in California has risen from an estimated 100 in 1943 to perhaps 600 or 700 today, with an additional 400 or 500 in school. Seventy-five per cent of the preschool blindness has been due to retrolental fibroplasia. The advent of a considerable portion of this large number of young blind persons to the aid rolls will mean that an increasing emphasis must be placed by the Social Welfare Programs for the Blind upon reduction of dependency among younger blind persons, particularly economic dependency.

- D. In Conclusion -- To fulfill the specific purposes laid down by the Legislature in enacting the Aid to the Blind programs, these programs must be geared in their administration to the provision of security, opportunity, and hope to needy blind men and women. The adequate supervision of the administration of Aid to the Blind by the State Department of Social Welfare involves two basic phases of activity which really cannot be entirely separated: First, the continuous supervision of the administration of the programs by the 58 county welfare departments by means of the several methods in use by the State Department of Social Welfare; and second, positive and imaginative efforts to assist blind persons to decrease dependency -- physical, social, and economic. This task of translating the legislative mandate into a practical program of action has required many concurrent approaches which are not only designed to help blind persons to decrease dependency but also and inevitably result in raising the whole level of administration of Aid to the Blind. Continuous effort has been put forth over the years, and is increasing in tempo, to fashion the three social welfare programs for the blind into more effective instruments to meet the problems incident to blindness -- and thus to be of maximum assistance to blind men and women as well as to effectively discharge the department's responsibilities in carrying out the Legislature's specific mandates.

II. Public Health Programs for the Prevention of Blindness

- A. Background -- Measures directed at the prevention of blindness have been part of the existing public health program for a number of years. Largely as a result of the law requiring prophylaxis in the eyes of newborn infants, and with the use of antibiotic drugs, blindness from ophthalmia neonatorum has practically disappeared. Ophthalmia itself has been reduced from an average of 32 cases per year for each year from 1940 to 1945 to nine cases reported in 1954.

Following adoption of the law requiring prenatal serology, the amount of inherited and potentially blinding syphilis in children under one year of age decreased approximately two-thirds up to 1945, and in 1954 only eleven cases were reported. The story of these two diseases is indicative of the progress made in reducing blindness resulting from infectious diseases.

In other respects we are not so fortunate. For example, during the fiscal year 1953-54, the State Health Department spent over half a million dollars for the diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions of children under the age of 21 years--conditions which, if left untreated, would have led to serious visual problems, if not blindness, in many instances. More than 7,500 children were seen in this program.

- B. Current Activities -- Perhaps the most significant development in prevention of blindness in recent years has come with the discovery that excessive amounts of oxygen administered to small prematurely born infants is, in all probability, responsible for retrolental fibroplasia. Unknown 15 years ago, retrolental fibroplasia accounted for blindness of all but two of the 58 children born in the peak year 1952 and now being provided preschool services by official and voluntary agencies. Almost 80 per cent of the 500 known blind children under the age of seven years were blinded by retrolental fibroplasia.

On the basis of the discovery of the role played by oxygen, the department, on the recommendation of an ad hoc advisory committee, sent to all physicians, hospital administrators and nursing directors, to all public health officers, consultant public health nurses, to ambulance and clinical oxygen supply companies, and others who might be concerned, a statement on the relationship of oxygen administration to prematurely born infants and the occurrence of retrolental fibroplasia. This document with its strongly stated recommendations has been followed by an intensive visiting schedule by our maternity nursing consultants equipped with an oxygen measuring device for demonstration. The effect of the application of this new knowledge is already apparent in a dramatic reduction in the number of blind children coming to the attention of public agencies.

Exploration of additional opportunities for epidemiologic research, quick dissemination and prompt application of new techniques for preventing more blindness was made possible by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant for a three-year study. Under the Bureau of Chronic Diseases, this special project draws upon the total resources of the Department and is being immediately conducted by a small staff with special experience in statistical studies and community health education.

- C. Statistical Studies -- The primary purpose of this project is to investigate the practicability of a public health program for the prevention of blindness. Lacking information on the size and nature of the blindness problem, the staff undertook, and has almost completed, statistical studies designed to serve as a basis for planning programs

of prevention. There are a variety of sources from which it seemed possible to piece together a more accurate and complete picture of blindness in California and we were met with fine cooperation from such agencies as the State Departments of Social Welfare, Education, Industrial Relations, the Franchise Tax Board, and local departments of health and welfare. This investigation has been subject to limitations in that demographic information is not available for the blindness known to most of the agencies. An even more important lack is of information on the cause of blindness, the most significant factor so far as we are concerned.

From the information now available, we know that a good share of blindness is in two preventable forms, glaucoma and amblyopia ex anopsia. Glaucoma is the second leading cause of adult blindness, accounting for more than thirteen per cent. On the basis of large scale surveys in other parts of the country, it is reliably estimated that two per cent of the adult population over forty years of age have undetected glaucoma. Since the cause of glaucoma is unknown to medical science and restoration of visual loss is not possible, the application of blindness prevention knowledge becomes crucial. With early detection and adequate medical supervision those afflicted with glaucoma can be prevented from becoming blind and economically dependent. The importance of amblyopia in vision conservation lies in the opportunity for correction in the preschool years. Vigorous efforts at early detection and referral for medical care will give to the eye specialists the few years in which it is possible for them to do their corrective work and thus prevent a share of blindness, the more unfortunate because it is lifelong.

- D. Demonstration Projects -- Following the recommendations of an advisory committee, project staff members have been active in promoting interest in local demonstrations of blindness prevention. In San Bernardino County discussions with the health officer and all ophthalmologists practicing in the county have now led to formation of a planning committee and the development of a proposal for a demonstration of glaucoma case finding, referral for diagnosis, registration of diagnosed patients, and follow-up to see that they remain under medical supervision. In Fresno, Orange, and Yolo Counties, and Santa Barbara City, discussions are under way which may lead to similar proposals. In Long Beach City, Marin and Santa Clara Counties, discussions with the health officers and professional groups may result in plans for demonstrations of vision screening in the preschool age population.

The Prevention of Blindness Project represents the most concrete way in which the State Health Department has moved to demonstrate that technical knowledge can be applied toward the objective of preventing a greater share of blindness in California. In collecting data needed for planning preventive programs, assuming leadership in helping to bring professional knowledge to bear on the problem, adding emphasis to our traditional role of education, and in stimulating community planning for programs of prevention, the Department will fulfill an urgent need. We offer the methods of education, case finding and referral, and follow-up which are well established in public health practice as the best opportunity for reducing a share of the human and economic toll of blindness.

III. Educational Programs for the Blind

Through the several agencies established by the Legislature and administered or supervised by the State Department of Education, California provided during the year a wide variety of services to meet the individual needs of approximately 4,300 blind children and adults. The program included: home teacher service to preschool children and their parents; special education for blind children of school age; reader service for blind college students; intensive orientation and prevocational training for recently blinded adults; vocational rehabilitation and placement; home visiting service to assist blind adults in personal, home, and community adjustment; Braille library and talking book service for both adults and children; opportunity center service for blind adults who sought to supplement their Aid through part-time occupation in handicrafts; state-subsidized workshops for blind men and women who desired full-time employment but who were unable to secure it in private industries.

A. Home Teaching for Preschool Blind Children -- Under the direction of the Superintendent, California School for the Blind, five teachers served 236 blind children of preschool age and their parents in Southern California. (In Northern and Central California the Variety Club Blind Babies Foundation, working in close cooperation with the Department of Education, served approximately 300 such children.) Of these blind children approximately three of every four were blinded by retrolental fibroplasia.

B. Education of Blind Children of School Age -- During 1954-55 the number of blind children receiving special elementary and secondary education, including adjustment to living in a sighted world, increased from 368 to 475. Of these, 160 were in residence at the California School for the Blind in Berkeley, and 315 were enrolled in special classes or under individual instruction in 11 local school districts at Campbell, Fresno, Hawthorne, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Redwood City, San Diego, San Francisco, San Leandro, Stockton, and Temple City.

Of the 160 pupils resident at the State school, 20 attended public high schools in Berkeley or Oakland. The State school had enrolled 8 pupils who were both deaf and blind.

C. Reader Service for Blind College Students -- The fund for readers for blind college students were used during the 1954-55 college year by 66 students at a cost to the state of \$21,729.96. At its 1955 session the Legislature authorized an increase in the amount of reader service which may be provided for blind college students, and also extended the reader service to younger blind pupils.

D. Intensive Orientation and Prevocational Training -- The Oakland Orientation Center for the Blind, which was established in the Fall of 1951 and commenced operation in the Spring of 1952, reported that, of the 95 blind persons referred to the Center during 1954-55, 29 were enrolled and fourteen completed training. Of these 14, six are employed, three are taking further academic or vocational training, one is still unemployed, and the employment status of four is unknown.

- E. Vocational Rehabilitation of Blind Adults -- For the year ending June 30, 1955, the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation reports the following case movement for blind clients:

On hand July 1, 1954	-	369
New cases accepted	-	<u>219</u>
TOTAL:	-	588

Closed rehabilitated	-	82
Closed unemployed	-	35
Closed other reasons	-	<u>46</u>
TOTAL CLOSED:	-	163

On hand June 30, 1955	-	425
-----------------------	---	-----

During the year, 92 blind were assisted in securing remunerative employment; of these 30 were placed in private industry, 36 as operators of vending stands, eight in other small business occupations, five in subsidized workshops, three in family service, and 10 in miscellaneous occupations. Of the 92 persons placed, 39 were removed from the relief rolls. After placement the average weekly earning per blind person was \$57.34.

- F. Home Teaching and Guidance for Recently Blinded Adults -- During the year 1954-55, 25 home teachers made approximately 15,292 home visits to an average of 2,000 blind clients each month, giving 13,828 lessons in Braille, typing, orientation, household arts, etc. There were approximately 4,994 counseling sessions; 1,548 blind persons were contacted for the first time; and 788 referrals were made to other agencies. Considerable increase has been made in the actual instruction of Braille, typing, independent cane travel, household arts, etc.; and great progress has been made toward the integration of the blind client with the family and the community. With an increased staff, it has been possible to devote more time to those who, in addition to being blind, are also totally deaf. Lessons in communication with this group have been given to the deaf-blind client and also to family members.

- G. State Library - Books for the Blind -- During the fiscal year 1954-55 there was an increase of approximately 10 per cent in the circulation of Talking Books, Braille books and Moon type books. During 1954-55 the State Library circulated 82,948 volumes of embossed books and containers of Talking Book records as contrasted with 75,722 volumes and containers during 1953-54. There was a net gain of 187 borrowers.

The demand for Talking Book machines for the use of children between the ages of 5 and 16 is continually increasing. Machines have now been lent to 183 children.

The new model Talking Book machines distributed by this department during the year were all of the type which will play the textbooks recorded on Soundscribe records as well as the regular Talking Book records. More and more students are making use of these specially recorded textbooks in their college courses.

- H. Employment in State-subsidized Workshops -- The fiscal year 1954-55 brought a leveling-off period in volume of sales from the three workshop centers for the blind operated by the Department of Education. The trend in net profit on sales for the last five years has been as follows:

<u>1950-51</u>	<u>1951-52</u>	<u>1952-53</u>	<u>1953-54</u>	<u>1954-55</u>
\$113,012	\$252,962	\$183,309	\$27,356	\$64,729

The increase which commenced in 1950-51 and reached a peak in May, 1952, was primarily due to sales to the Federal Government. These sales began to fall off abruptly in February 1953 and reached a minimum in 1954-55. The effort which was made to secure other markets to replace the decreased sales to the Federal Government is indicated in the following analysis of gross sales of the Centers for the last four years:

	<u>1951-52</u>	<u>1952-53</u>	<u>1953-54</u>	<u>1954-55</u>
Sales to Federal Gov't	\$2,349,655	\$1,653,713	\$1,042,363	\$880,873
All other sales	602,848	855,037	1,155,554	1,263,503
	<u>\$2,952,503</u>	<u>\$2,508,750</u>	<u>\$2,197,917</u>	<u>\$2,144,376</u>

Employment is directly related to sales, and wages paid the blind and handicapped men and women in the centers for the five-year period were as follows:

<u>1950-51</u>	<u>1951-52</u>	<u>1952-53</u>	<u>1953-54</u>	<u>1954-55</u>
\$396,862	\$545,265	\$469,897	\$493,687	\$457,866

Efforts by the Department to improve pay rates for the workers is evidenced by the fact that in 1951-52 they received .1847 of each sales dollar and in 1954-55 this had increased to .2135, despite inflationary increases in raw materials during this period.

The Ways and Means and Finance Committees of the Assembly and Senate have requested recommendations from representatives of the Departments of Finance, Education, and Social Welfare relating to the operation of the Centers.

ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL

At its regular meetings the Council reviewed progress reports and suggestions submitted by its working committee, and considered the following specific items:

- A. Public Law 565 and its implications for rehabilitation of the blind.
- B. Current legislation in California as it affected the blind.
- C. The place of Opportunity Centers in the program for the blind.

- D. Aid to Partially Self-supporting Blind in relation to employment in subsidized workshops.
- E. The rise and fall in incidence of blindness among preschool age children as it would affect the need for special educational facilities for blind children during the next ten years.
- F. Ways for developing effective coordination among the several agencies actively engaged in work for the blind.